

DECORATION DAY.

AN ADDRESS

BY

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President Judge, 16th District, Pa.

Delivered at Bedford, Pa., May 31, 1880.

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The following address was delivered at the Court House, in Bedford, Pa., on May 31, 1880, on Decoration Day occasion, by Hon. WILLIAM McCLAY HALL, President Judge of the 16th Pennsylvania Judicial District, and is printed by request :

ADDRESS.

Patriotism is a virtue absolutely essential to a continuation of national life. A cowardly and selfish people, unwilling to make personal sacrifices to maintain the national honor, cannot long endure. All history demonstrates this.

Love of home, of kindred, of wife and children, and father and mother, and sister and brother, these are noble impulses—sacred passions implanted by a beneficent Creator in the human heart to add to man's happiness and conduce to his welfare.

But the time comes occasionally when love of country rises above all other duty and calls upon the citizen to forsake all the pleasant surroundings of home, all the en-
dearing ties of friendship and love, and go forth to war—war that brings with it exposure and fatigue, and disease, and wounds, and starvation, and imprisonment, and agony, and death; that fills the land with mourning and desolates the face of nature.

When men obey the high call of patriotism and sacrifice their lives for the public good in a necessary and just war to defend the national life, that the government founded by our fathers may descend to our children and our children's children to the latest posterity; that, in the language of President Lincoln, the government of the people, by the people, for the people, may not perish from the earth, it is but little that the survivors can do towards paying the debt of gratitude we owe the dead. Their widows and orphans can be taken care of, and their graves can be decked with flowers. In the pleasant spring time

when the earth has put on her soft robes of green and the God-given flowers have opened so beautifully around us, and all nature is instinct with life and beauty, we can annually assemble to recall to memory their noble deeds. It may or it may not be known to them what we do here to-day. Who can tell? Their disembodied spirits may be cognizant of our doings, and our memorial services may rise like grateful incense to the domain in which they now dwell. But whether this be so or not, we owe it to ourselves to keep alive this custom.

Who can say what demands the future holds, or how soon the Nation may have cause again to test the patriotism of her sons? If patriotism be a virtue necessary to national life it must be fostered and encouraged and instilled into the minds of the people. The rising generation in boyhood and young manhood must cultivate martial ardor and love of country. Deeds of bravery and courage, and fortitude and heroism, should be commended in song and story, and men everywhere should learn to know and feel that a brave and honorable death is better than an ignoble, cowardly and selfish life; that the gallant soldier who rises above the narrow view of self-ease and safety, and goes forth to battle for his country's welfare, is worthy of the highest regard and veneration; and that the memory of the dead should abide forever in the hearts of the living, that their descendants for generations may feel a pride in their ancestry; an elevating and ennobling pride that father or grandfather,

or uncle or grand uncle died in the war for the Union. Such a legacy is worth more than gold. No wealth can purchase it, no breath of misfortune take it away. It is invaluable; it is imperishable.

We have assembled to-day to commemorate their deeds; to recall the names of the soldier dead who lie buried in our cemeteries, and with martial music to deck their last resting places with flowers. It is a sad but beautiful ceremonial. They perished like flowers cut down untimely in the prime and beauty of young manhood.

There are others that we cannot thus honor. Some lie in unknown graves on distant battle fields; some died from starvation in the horrid prison pens of the South and fill the trenches of unmarked misery. Their very fate can only be surmised. No kindly hand strews flowers over their remains.

There are others still who yet move about among us with a wooden leg or an empty sleeve, sad living monuments of devastating war; and some with shattered constitutions drag out the remnant of their days. To provide for all such is the Nation's solemn duty.

War is destruction. It is essentially barbarous and cruel. Disguise it as we will; try to soften and refine it as you may, throw around its conduct all the restraining influence civilization and humanity can suggest, and it yet remains HORRID WAR!

"Oh war, what art thou?"

After the brightest triumph what remains
Of all thy glories? When the song of dear-
bought joy

Salutes the victor's ear and soothes his pride
How is the grateful harmony profaned
By the sad dissonance of virgins' cries
Who mourn their lovers slain! Of matrons
hoar

Who clasp their withered hands and fond-
ly ask

Their slaughtered sons!
How is the laurel's verdure stained with
blood,

And wet with widows' tears!"

God never designed that men should slaughter each other. His benevolence and beneficence are infinite. Wars, like other human ills, are man-made; there is nothing

in the Divine constitution of human affairs that makes them necessary. If individuals and nations governed their conduct by the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, men would beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks and would learn war no more. The world is growing gray with age, and yet this nineteenth century of the Christian Era is still sadly full of cruelty and wrong. It must be possible that in the ultimate progress of the human race some tribunal can be established to settle human disputes without this horrible relic of barbarism, this cruel *ultima ratio regium*, which has so long desolated the earth.

What a spectacle Christian Europe presents to-day! The whole object of national organization and government on the continent is that the masses may toil in ignorance and poverty to support large disciplined armies ready at any moment to slaughter each other in battle to preserve the so-called balance of power. Throw the balance of power and the whole brood of kings and nobles to the dogs rather than maintain them at such a price of toil and blood. And this very war of ours, this wiping-out of slavery, this forgiveness and reconciliation, and restoration of the union, are a long step forward in the right direction.

Of all people we are most happily situated in this regard. We need no standing army except a nominal one. Our government rests on justice and public opinion. Our citizen soldiers, intelligent and courageous and inspired by love of country, have ever been ready to respond to all just demands upon their patriotism.

The advice of Polonius to his young friend is good for nations as for individuals

"Beware of entrance to a quarrel; but, being in,
Carry thyself that thine opponent may beware of thee."

Thus has it ever been with our Nation; thus may it ever be. It is only in self-defence, as a dernier resort, that either men or nations have a right to take up arms.

We have rid ourselves of the fearful wrong of African Slavery. It was to some extent a national sin, and we have paid a national penalty. It was more particularly a sin of the South, and they have suffered the more severely. When the culture of cotton became profitable in the hands of an oligarchy of slave-holders, they departed from the faith of our forefathers that slavery was a wrong to be gradually done away with as soon as it could be accomplished with safety, and came to regard it as an institution to be perpetuated and extended.

It was because of their fear that their peculiar institution was in peril that they rebelled against the election of Lincoln and inaugurated the war.

The Almighty Disposer of events interfered by a wonderful series of Providences to thwart their iniquity, and the great wrong was wiped out in a deluge of blood.

We are happily rid of it. We have paid the penalty which, with nations as with individuals, always follows the infraction of Divine Law, and our nation is once again prosperous and happy. No portentous clouds are lowering, the skies are serene, and white-winged peace hovers protectingly over the entire land. Long may it so continue. And yet if the time does come that we are compelled to embark in a just and necessary war, may our young men always respond with patriotism to their country's call.

Meantime let us treasure the memory of our dead, and with every recurring Spring deck their hallowed resting places with beautiful flowers. May the time when another war comes to crowd out their memories by other martial deeds be long postponed.

We can best exhibit our appreciation of the dead and of the sacrifice they made, by preserving pure and free the institutions and the government they died to maintain, by discharging our duty as citizens and voters intelligently and from a conviction of duty. Doubtless party organizations are necessary and proper, as a means to an end. But the welfare of party must not

rise above the welfare of the State. Party leaders cultivate partisanship for their own personal aggrandisement. The real future peril to our country is from corrupt party rings. We need statesmen looking to the general public good, and not partisans who care only for the success of party, and hold to the detestable doctrine that the end justifies the means—the end to be attained party success, the means, the division of offices and power among the ring. The maxim, to the victors belong the spoils, is full of danger to the Republic. The pressing need of the times is its utter extermination and destruction.

Unfortunately such partisans hold high place in both political parties. Virtue resides in the hearts of the masses of both parties, but too often they are bound by party cliques and set-up conventions that fail to consult and disregard the popular will, and leave the people impotent to control by their votes, having really no choice except to vote for the nominee with whose selection they had nothing to do. The vice and weakness of our system seems to lie just here.

All republics whose wrecks strew the pathway of time, have perished from the retention of power by magistrates and cliques against the will of the people. In this matter eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. The smallest beginnings must be watched and guarded against. When the trickling stream first washes over the embankment, a few shovels-ful of earth will check it; neglected, the break becomes a chasm, the streamlet an irresistible torrent, sweeping destruction over the land.

No ring within a party has a right to dictate nominations. There must be no party oligarchy. The whole party must be consulted and freely indicate its choice. Any other course is treason to party and immensely perilous to the general weal. When a party cannot free itself from the yoke of a ring except by revolution, revolution is a solemn duty. The tyranny of party maintained by trickery and fraud and a division of spoils is as objectionable to a

freeman as any other tyranny. It is more dangerous than an open foe.

Before we pass to the further duties of the day let us pay a passing tribute of respect to the dead commander-in-chief, the lamented Lincoln. He, too, died a soldier, at the head of our armies; died by the hand of a cowardly assassin, for all assassination is essentially cowardly—a secret and treacherous assault upon an unarmed and unsuspecting victim. Time works great changes. Its softening influences upon human passion is needed before the actors in great events can take their proper place in history. The rancor that saw alone in Mr. Lincoln, uncouthness, malevolence, ignorance and partisanship, has to a great extent disappeared. The great qualities of the man begin to be seen even by those who were his bitterest revilers and foes. May I not say that we all here, without regard to party, honor the memory of the man as a statesman and philanthropist actuated by a profoundly unselfish and earnest desire for the welfare of his country and his fellow-men?

One other thought that may not be inappropriate to the occasion. The war resulted in setting free four millions of slaves. The necessity of the case has made them equal as citizens before the law. They have done wonderfully well, and are fast learning to be industrious and many of them intelligent citizens. I doubt whether any race of people laboring under all their disadvantages would have done better—perhaps none so well. It is not easy at once to lay aside old prejudices, and yet certainly it is the duty of all citizens to do so. It is the behest of true manhood and courage that it should be done.

To forgive and forget is noble. An adversary who has been belligerent under a misapprehension, and who expresses regret, ought to be at once met with the extended hand of reconciliation. But both sides were not right in this war. One or the other was frightfully wrong. Forgiveness does not mean that we are to fail to properly enunciate on suitable occasions the just-

ness and humanity of our war. And yet there were doubtless good people, earnest Christian people, engaged in the rebellion such arrant self-deceivers are men who warped and blinded by their surroundings and by their narrow vision.

I have here the lists of the dead soldiers of this county. I wish that time would permit to read them to you. More than one thousand of the prime of the manhood of this single county of Bedford went out to this war. Of this number over six hundred died in the service, in battle and from disease. One of every six of the men of the county went forth to battle—one of every ten of the men of the county laid down his life on the altar of his country. Ingrates and cravens are we, and false to our duty, if we fail to love our country and her free institutions and to venerate the memory of our soldier dead.

Let me tell you an incident of the war. From among us here in this village of Bedford there went out a young lawyer, OSWALD HAMPTON GAITHER, in all the health and hope and fond aspiration of young manhood. The patriotism, the valor, the honor of the country had been appealed to by the President's proclamation, and from the pulpit and the rostrum, to stand by the Union of our fathers. The call of duty sounded so imperatively in his ears that his conscience would not permit him to say no. He left all the happy surroundings of our beautiful village and marched forth to uphold the heroic stars and stripes of our ancestors. On one of the battle fields of Virginia he fell, pierced through the breast with a bullet. As he lay upon his hospital bed, conscious of his approaching dissolution, with no mother's hand to wipe the death sweat from his brow, he was visited by a Presbyterian minister, who spoke to him of the approaching end. He replied, I am prepared to die so far as the consolations of religion are concerned, but oh! still it is hard to die thus, on the very verge of a life that was so full of hope and promise and aspirations of usefulness and fame, but I am consoled by the thought that I

perish for the good of my country, that her government and free institutions may live. In a few hours after he was in eternity. Angels leaned over the battlements of Heaven with outstretched hands to welcome to paradise the soul of that young Christian Hero.

Death is inevitable. However we may exclude the unwelcome thought it comes to all. Each one must cross, and cross alone so far as human aid is concerned, the dark waters that separate us from immortality. The fate of those we this day commemorate

is assured. Their battle of life is fought and ended gloriously. Some of us who survive may fill dishonored graves, may stain our lives with unworthiness or disgrace our names and lineage. Not so with these. In the language of the brave Roman, Horatius, who more than two thousand years ago kept the bridge so well,

“To every one upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds
For the ashes of his fathers,
The temple of his gods.”

